

*An Artist's Journey*

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract:

The main component of my thesis project was a combined senior clarinet recital with my colleague and good friend Angela Kinerk. Our program consisted of a clarinet duet, as well as solo works showcasing unique styles. It demonstrated my growth as a musician and technical skills I have developed while studying clarinet at Ball State. The recital was presented on November 20, 2014 and was approximately an hour in length. A recording of the performance has been submitted along with the artist's statement.

## Acknowledgements:

My musical progress cannot be recognized without mentioning the important people who guided me, mentored me, and occasionally tested me or lit a fire of motivation under me.

First of all, I would like to thank my clarinet professor, Dr. Elizabeth Crawford, for advising me during this project and for being one of the most influential educators of my career. Her dedication to music and to her students is incredible. She provides an excellent example to future educators, as well as inspiration for creating and taking ownership of music for individuals. I am grateful to Dr. Crawford for presenting me with some of my greatest challenges and for teaching me how to work toward the seemingly impossible. She is truly outstanding and deserves the highest recognition for all that she does as such an influential educator.

Next I would like to thank Angela Kinerk, my partner for the recital. As we prepared for this program we worked together, shared ideas and concerns, and ultimately enjoyed the rewards of performing a wonderful duet together. The entire journey was an incredible experience, and I'm glad to have shared it with such a fantastic musician.

I would also like to thank my many musical and educational influences who initially sparked my interest in the activity, fostered my learning along the way, and continue to encourage me as I pursue this exciting career.

Of course, I want to thank my friends and family for their incessant support and encouragement that has been truly appreciated throughout my entire involvement in music, especially to my incredible parents, grandparents, siblings, and Ryan.

Finally I thank God for providing me the opportunity to study music, for allowing me to share my performances with others, and for blessing me by bringing these wonderful influences into my life.

## Artist's Statement

The task of planning a clarinet recital is a process and definitely a time commitment. From selecting repertoire to finding an accompanist and spending countless hours confined to a practice room, it was something I had to take very seriously. The preparation for this recital began in the spring of my junior year, listening to different composers and repertoire that was familiar to me. I also sought recommendations from colleagues and a long list of new possibilities from my clarinet professor, Dr. Elizabeth Crawford. I listened critically to each of the options to try to discover what pieces would match my personality, would complement each other well in a recital program, as well as build a rationale for the pieces that I chose. Each piece needed a purpose. I not only wanted to showcase my growth as an independent musician over my four years of collegiate study, but I wanted to build a musical identity.

I collaborated with my colleague and friend Angela Kinerk when planning for our combined recital in order to create a harmonized, cohesive set of pieces that would construct the overall theme of our recital. We decide to branch out from the traditional and standard works that are typically performed for our instruments and find pieces that were more unique and personal. This was an opportunity to share pieces of music with the audience not necessarily from the traditional standards of Classical or Romantic music. My selections, as well as Angela's choices, did not necessarily come from these time periods and utilized advanced, unique styles and clarinet performance techniques.

Dr. Crawford guided me in finding repertoire that was appropriately challenging, fit my musical and technical capabilities, as well as interesting and unique in my developing musicianship. We also needed to consider pieces that were cohesive yet also contrasted enough to maintain an entertaining program. While I decided on pieces from similar time periods—twentieth century—I was able to select ones with contrasting styles. It also involved careful study of different performance techniques and characteristics of the composers.

As much as this recital was to display my musicianship to the audience, it was just as significantly a challenge to myself to evaluate what kind of progress I

had made in four years and how far I could continue to push myself. I set out to prove that I was capable of more than what I had previously held myself accountable. I needed to set higher standards in order to be satisfied with the performance and conquer what I used to consider impossible. That was my mindset and goal as I began thinking about my recital repertoire.

## The Program

Our program opened with *Duo No. 2* by Bernhard Crusell. Since this was a combined recital, Angela and I wanted to include a piece that we could work on and perform together. This pleasant composition is part of a progressive set of duets and incorporates canonic melodies that are playfully echoed between the two parts. Although the lines were fairly independent, they are equally important to the progression of the piece. The melodies are light with a bouncy, lifted separation of notes. Angela and I were able to collaborate on this piece as we began lacing our two parts together. The piece allowed us to refine our articulation skills and work on qualities of matching each other. Our biggest challenge was creating an identical style with one another. We had to agree on articulation, inflection, and length of notes because our melodic lines played off one another and mimicked the entrance of the previous person. We worked a lot on listening while we played, trying to blend and fit into the sounds we were hearing. This was a great exercise in musical collaboration. We chose to use this piece as the opening of our recital to be able to support each other, ease our nerves by having a colleague on stage, and emphasize the importance of working together with other musicians.

The second piece on my portion of the recital was an unaccompanied solo by Béla Kovács called *Hommage à Khatschaturian* from his collection of “Hommages” to nine composers. This piece became my personal endeavor. The *Hommages* collection gives performers the opportunity to study styles indigenous of each composer. My selection, *Hommage à Khatschaturian*, demonstrated composer Aram Khatschaturian’s famous techniques of repeated notes, rhythmic virtuosity, skilled improvisation, and sensuous melodies. As a beginning musician, I was somewhat of a timid and unconfident performer. Through my studies with Dr. Crawford, I developed my tone production, technique, and overall musicianship. This piece in particular allowed me to break out of my shell a bit in terms of technique and push myself beyond my previous limits. I challenged myself by choosing this piece because I knew it would improve my capabilities and allow me to experiment with important performance decisions and artistic leisure. It was my most difficult piece on the program, but it was also the most rewarding.

The last piece on my half of the recital was a piece with piano accompaniment, *Pocket-Size Sonata No. 2* by Alec Templeton. This was a three movement collection that incorporated different jazz styles and solo techniques. The new advanced techniques that I had to learn to perform included glissandi and manipulation of pitches and tempo. The piece allowed for lots of artistic freedom and interpretation that I had to study before being able to execute the correct style I wanted to convey. Since this piece was freer and focused more on musicianship rather than technicality, I was able to make it my own and perform it according to my unique artistic taste. I could let go of the sometimes-rigid constraints of technical music and simply perform music for music's sake. I thoroughly enjoyed being able to break away from my serious personality to truly have fun performing this piece and working with my talented accompanist, Branden Downing.

## The Composers

Bernhard Crusell was born on October 15, 1775 and died July 28, 1838. He was a Swedish-Finnish clarinetist, composer, and translator born in Finland into a poor family of bookbinders. At the age of eight, he learned to play a friend's clarinet by ear and then began receiving training from a member of the Nyland regimental band. In 1788 (age thirteen), his natural talent was recognized and he was given a position as a volunteer member of the Sveaborg military band, where he excelled in music and languages. At age sixteen, he was appointed as the director of the regiment band there. Crusell became principle clarinetist with the Royal Court Orchestra when he was seventeen years old. Five years later he was able to study in Berlin with well-known German clarinetist Franz Tausch, who founded the German school of playing that emphasized beauty of tone over technique. He lived in Sweden for the rest of his life, but still considered himself a Finn. Crusell also performed and studied with Jean-Xavier Leferve.

Before 1800, Crusell played with the reed of his mouthpiece turned up, rather than the modern practice that is more compatible with cantabile playing. He is greatly admired for his pianissimo playing, round tone, and even quality throughout the range of the instrument. He composed concertos, chamber works, an opera, vocal pieces, arrangements of military marches and overtures, as well as numerous clarinet works.

Béla Kovács was born on May 1, 1937 in Tatabánya, Hungary. He is a famous Hungarian clarinetist and graduated from the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest. Critics rave that he is the finest Hungarian clarinetist of his time. Exceptionally talented, Kovács became a member of the Hungarian State Opera Orchestra at the early age of nineteen when he was still studying at the Liszt Academy. He later became the principal clarinetist there and stayed in that position until he left the ensemble in 1971. In 1969, Kovács joined the faculty at the Liszt Academy and was hired as a professor in 1975. He also taught at the University of Music and Dramatic Arts in Graz and the Conservatorio di Musica in Udine.

Béla Kovács composed a set of nine short concert solos for clarinet called *Hommages* that each model the style of a different composer. They are widely



studied and used as performance pieces today. The composers that he includes in this set are J.S. Bach, Niccolò Paganini, Carl Maria von Weber, Claude Debussy, Manuel de Falla, Richard Strauss, Bela Bartok, Zoltan Kodaly, and Aram Khatschaturian. The performance notes within the music for this set explain that these pieces are intended as material to balance the traditional exercises that can be often dull and mechanical. They require impressive dexterity and careful study of different styles. The performers need to include a sense of humor and level of fantasy to recognize the value of these works, as well as devote more focused attention to them. The solo from this collection that I chose for my recital was based on Aram Khatschaturian.

In order to accurately practice and interpret this piece, I also needed to study the composer for whom it was fashioned. Aram Khatschaturian was a Russian-Armenian composer and conductor. He is considered one of the leading Soviet composers and most renowned composer of twentieth century Russia. The most famous of his works is his ballet music, the most popular piece being *The Sabre Dance* from the ballet "Gayane." It has been widely used in popular culture, as well as performed and covered by musicians across the world. Styles and motives from this piece were definitely present in the *Hommage* selection that I played. The elements that were characteristic of Khatschaturian included repetitive notes, pulsating rhythm, and colorful, sensual melodies.

Alec Templeton was born in 1909 and died in 1963. He came from a deprived background, and in fact he was blind but also blessed with perfect pitch. Templeton was a television and radio celebrity in the 1940s and 1950s, appearing on shows hosted by Bing Crosby and even later having his own show called "It's Alec Templeton Time." Although he was blind, he was a very talented improviser and could naturally feel the rhythms of syncopated music. He was, however, limited in his technical abilities. The most notable element of his music, especially the *Pocket-Size Sonata No. 2* that I performed, is that he does not compose what would be considered "serious music." As I began to study Templeton and the style of this piece, I understood that it would demand a lot more out of me from an interpretation and personality standpoint rather than the technical side. His

handicap allowed him to physically feel more of the music and create outstanding interpretations. He has been noted for beautiful phrasing, careful accentuation, soulful melodies, and dramatic expressiveness. His performance abilities in these areas have been described as natural, and I would agree with that because his visual limitations require a stronger devotion to what one can control about music—interpretation and ownership. I wanted to emulate the same passion I imagined as if Templeton were performing this music.

As a naturally serious and soft-spoken individual, I struggled with this at first. I tried to be too mechanical and metronomic as I was playing. This was indeed necessary when first hashing through notes and rhythms to learn the piece, but I quickly needed to move on to developing its character. That also became a process of developing my own character. I tried to truly throw myself into this music and create the moods I wanted to convey to my audience. Eventually, this became the most entertaining piece on my program because I was able to be free with it. I broke down some of my rigid boundaries and let myself become absorbed in the story of the piece. It was truly a joy to perform, and I also feel that it was a rewarding piece to end my program.

## Reflection:

As I mentioned before, preparing for this recital was a huge commitment. I took time carefully considering options for my repertoire in order to find just the right pieces, fumbled for weeks beginning to learn the mechanics and difficulties of each, and fretted many hours in the confinements of the practice room—facing the wall to ward off any distractions of a passer by and focusing on refining my technique. I performed for my peers to gain confidence and feedback, as well as did a lot of personal recording to get a true judgment of my progress. I learned a lot about myself through this recital process because I spent so much time self-evaluating and criticizing. However, eventually I realized I could never move forward if I did not have the attitude to make this product a success. I wanted my senior recital to be a showcase, not just another performance. I wanted to be happy with the results, but most importantly I needed to be proud of the work that I had put in throughout the entire preparation process. This semester I spent any extra time I could find working on something related to improving this recital. Mostly this involved utilizing time to practice, but it also meant carefully planning those practice sessions, making notes throughout, listening to recordings and different interpretations, and seriously studying the music. I can honestly say that I have never felt more productive than whenever I ended a practice session knowing that I had made something about my future performance better.

When the recital day finally arrived, I was anxious and nervous. This was one of the biggest performances I had given, at least on the intimate and personal performance level. The realization moment that I had leading to this recital was on the night of our dress rehearsal. After my professor and recital partner had left and I was finishing up practicing for the evening, I took a moment to picture myself giving the actual recital. No one was in the performance hall but me, and I stood onstage just trying to take it all in. Everything was finally coming together, and I was ready to present the final product to my audience. I wanted them to experience the emotions I had grown attached to in each piece. The pieces I chose represent parts of me, even if no one else understands it. I had finally made it to this level of

musicianship, and I felt pride in what I had accomplished. Although there were still a lot of nerves, this excitement carried over to the actual recital night.

As in any live performance, there were mistakes and definitely things that could have been better. Sometimes my nerves got the best of me or I was over-ambitious in the intensity of the moment. There were also many parts of the recital where I surprised myself and was very pleased with the music I created. These moments outweigh all negatives. That is what is great about music. It is not a perfect art, but is unique and wonderful each time. Having the opportunity to work this hard for something and finally reach it is an incredible and humbling experience. Through all of the preparation and worry, in the end it is the ultimate joy of music, love of performing, and ability to create an indescribable and memorable experience that made everything completely worthwhile.

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